



# A PEACE PLAN FOR A SAFER AMERICA

CREATED BY SURVIVORS, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE ONE.

MARCH  
FOR OUR  
LIVES 





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every day in America, more than 100 lives are taken by the deadly epidemic of gun violence.<sup>1</sup> Among young people, gun violence has become a top cause of death, second only to drug overdoses.<sup>2</sup> It has many root causes, including hate, poverty, and despair. It's a deeply intersectional issue, inextricably bound with our long journey for racial justice, economic justice, immigrant rights, and the rights of our LGBTQ allies. And it's amplified by the societal belief that a gun can solve our problems. Gun violence is destroying our generation. This is simply unacceptable.

**That's why, as survivors and students of March For Our Lives, we believe it's time for a Peace Plan for a Safer America.**

The next President must act with a fierce urgency to call this crisis what it is: **a national public health emergency**. They must acknowledge that the level of gun violence in the U.S. is unprecedented for a developed nation<sup>3</sup> — and only bold, new solutions can move the needle on the rates of gun injuries and deaths. They must recognize that gun violence has many faces in our communities, from rural suicides to intimate partner violence to urban youth violence to violence driven by white supremacist ideologies. And they must commit to holding an unpatriotic gun lobby and gun industry accountable not just for weakening our nation's gun laws, but also for illegal behavior in self-dealing<sup>4</sup> that offends and contradicts America's vast majority of responsible gun owners.

We believe in **C.H.A.N.G.E.** — **six bold steps** that the next Presidential Administration and Congress must take to address this national gun violence epidemic:



## **CHANGE THE STANDARDS OF GUN OWNERSHIP:**

Advocate and pass legislation **to raise the national standard for gun ownership:** a national licensing and registry system that promotes responsible gun ownership; a ban on assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, and other weapons of war; policies to disarm gun owners who pose a risk to themselves or others; and a national gun buy-back program **to reduce the estimated 265<sup>5</sup>–393<sup>6</sup> million firearms in circulation by at least 30%.**



2

**HALVE THE RATE OF GUN DEATHS IN 10 YEARS:**

Mobilize an urgent and comprehensive federal response: declare **a national emergency around gun violence** and announce an **audacious goal to reduce gun injuries and deaths by 50% in 10 years, thereby saving up to 200,000 American lives.**

3

**ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE GUN LOBBY AND INDUSTRY:**

Hold the gun lobby and industry **accountable for decades of illegal behavior** and **misguided policies** intended to shield only themselves; reexamine the *District of Columbia v. Heller* interpretation of the Second Amendment; initiate both FEC and IRS investigations into the NRA, and fully repeal the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act.

4

**NAME A DIRECTOR OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION:**

Appoint a **National Director of Gun Violence Prevention (GVP)** who reports directly to the President, with the mandate to operationalize our federal goals and empower existing federal agencies such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) – agencies that have all been structurally weakened by the gun lobby. The National Director of GVP would begin by overseeing a **down payment of \$250 million in annual funding for research by the CDC and other federal agencies** on gun violence prevention.

5

**GENERATE COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS:**

Fully fund **targeted interventions addressing the intersectional dimensions of gun violence**, including community-based urban violence reduction programs, suicide prevention programs, domestic violence prevention programs, mental and behavioral health service programs, and programs to address police violence in our communities.

6

**EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION:**

**Automatically register eligible voters and mail voter registration cards to all Americans when they turn 18.** Create the **"Safety Corps,"** a Peace Corps for gun violence prevention. Younger generations are disproportionately affected by gun violence. They should have a say in how their country solves this epidemic.

**WE DON'T HAVE  
TO LIVE LIKE THIS:  
IN FEAR FOR OUR  
LIVES AND OUR  
FAMILIES.**

The federal government has failed in its responsibility to protect the safety and well-being of the public with regard to the nation's gun violence epidemic. The time for comprehensive and sweeping reform is now. We need ambitious leadership throughout the whole of government to stand in opposition to the gun lobby and industry in order to secure a peaceful America for generations to come.

## A HIGHER STANDARD FOR NATIONAL GUN OWNERSHIP

**If we require a license to drive a car, we should certainly require a license to own a gun.**

For decades, the NRA and gun lobby have focused on a singular goal: to keep the standards for gun ownership dangerously low. To make a sizable dent in reducing gun violence, we need to do the complete opposite: **we need to raise the bar for gun ownership and responsibility in America.** This begins with what a wide body of research and international precedents tell us is essential to reducing gun violence: **a federal system of gun licensing.** The facts are clear: a comprehensive system of gun licensing reduces illegal gun trafficking<sup>8</sup>, cuts down on gun homicides<sup>9</sup>, and reduces gun suicides.<sup>10</sup>

For example, when Connecticut implemented a state gun licensing system, its firearms homicide rate declined 40%, with firearm suicides dropping by 15%. Gun licensing has also proven to be effective in other countries<sup>11</sup> like Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia,<sup>12</sup> all of which have established robust licensing systems and have dramatically lower per capita rates of gun deaths and injuries.<sup>13</sup> From a public health perspective, it should at least be as difficult to buy and transfer a firearm as it is to buy and transfer an automobile,<sup>14</sup> in which decades of regulating cars led to a dramatic improvement in automobile safety.<sup>15</sup>

The key elements of a national gun and ammunition licensing system would include:

- A multi-step approval process, overseen by a law enforcement agency, that **requires background checks, in-person interviews, personal references, rigorous gun safety training, and a waiting period of 10 days for each gun purchase.** Licenses would be renewed every year upon successful completion of annually refreshed requirements in the above areas. In the process, **a national registry of firearms sales** would be created to make gun owners responsible for their weapons and hold them accountable when those weapons are used in a crime. Our licensing system would also include the ability to disarm individuals who become a danger to themselves or others.



- **Annual licensing fees** for anyone who wants to obtain a national gun and ammunition license. Gun violence has indirect and direct costs of hundreds of billions of dollars each year,<sup>16</sup> and any responsible gun owner would pay into the national licensing system for the ability to possess and use firearms. In addition, we would impose higher fees on the **bulk purchase of firearms and ammunition**, which have been predicates to the misuse of firearms.<sup>17</sup>
- **A higher standard for gun ownership**, which would start with raising the minimum age for gun possession to 21.<sup>18</sup> **In addition, we would expand prohibited categories for obtaining a gun license**, with a focus on those with a propensity for violence. This would include: individuals with felony convictions, any level of domestic violence offenders (protective orders and misdemeanors), individuals with a documented history of violence, individuals convicted of hate crimes, individuals convicted of stalking, and individuals that make a credible and public threat against a specific person or institutions such as schools, churches, or workplaces.
- **A limit of one firearm purchase per month.**<sup>19</sup>
- **A prohibition on any and all online firearm and ammunition sales or transfers, including gun parts.**
- **A requirement to safely store firearms**, including implementing national standards for locking devices on guns.<sup>20</sup>
- **A requirement to report guns that are lost or stolen** to local law enforcement within 72 hours.<sup>21</sup>



National polling shows strong support for gun licensing, which is favored by 77% of Americans, including 68% of gun owners.<sup>22</sup> The next President must make a robust gun licensing system the centerpiece of a federal legislative agenda. **But a national licensing and registration system is insufficient to address all the faces of gun violence.** In addition, the next President must advocate and pass:

- **A federal ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.** It's simple: weapons of war that enable more casualties during mass shootings<sup>23</sup> should not be allowed on our streets and in our communities. We've debated this for decades and it's time to get it done.
- **A federal policy to effectively disarm gun owners who have become a risk to themselves or others.** For example, Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) laws give families and law enforcement a civil remedy to disarm individuals who are a danger to themselves or others; a 2018 study found that a Connecticut law similar to ERPO was associated with a 14% reduction in suicides.<sup>24</sup> We need a federal version of these policies — and we need to support states in training and implementation.
- **A national gun buy-back and disposal program.** There are an estimated 256-393 million civilian-owned firearms in the United States, which means there are more guns than people in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> In order to operationalize new laws like an assault weapons ban and a higher standard of gun ownership, we need to implement a federal gun buy-back program that facilitates compliance with new laws and provides economic incentives for gun owners to responsibly reduce their gun inventory. All government-purchased gun inventory would be destroyed. **The intended goal: a reduction of our domestic firearm stock by at least 30%.** To be clear: the implementation of an assault weapons ban should be a full **mandatory** buy-back of assault weapons, but we would also create programs to encourage **voluntary** civilian reduction of handguns and other firearms. Evidence indicates that a national gun buy-back program can itself help reduce gun violence; in fact, Australia's national gun buy-back program was associated with as much as a 57%<sup>26</sup> reduction in firearms deaths.<sup>27</sup>

- **State authority beyond federal law.** States and municipalities have long been our laboratories of democracy. Where federal policy is lacking or sits stalled in Congress, the next Administration needs to make it clear that states and municipalities are empowered to pass localized policies that go beyond federal law. States can also continue to lead with the above list of gun safety policies, much in the same way that states have led on other critical issues (like environmental law and policy) when the federal government has failed to act.

## AN URGENT FEDERAL RESPONSE

**The federal government has long proven its ability and powers when there is political will.**

We have never mobilized the full might of the federal government in the fight against gun violence. Quite the opposite: for decades, the gun lobby has weakened the enforcement authority of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF)<sup>28</sup> and prevented even basic scientific research by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).<sup>29</sup> Beginning with the next Administration, we demand **increased federal funding for a multi-agency approach** to tackling gun violence, including increased funding for ATF, DOJ, CDC, HHS, NIH, HUD, and DOE initiatives. On Day One in office, the next President should take two concurrent executive actions: (1) **declare a national emergency** around the epidemic of gun violence — both to unlock executive resources and publicly underscore the urgency of the moment — and (2) announce an audacious goal of reducing firearm deaths and injuries by 50% over the next ten years, thereby saving up to 200,000 lives.

To operationalize these goals, the President must **work with Congress to pass legislation** around gun licensing and enhanced gun ownership standards, bans on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, policies to disarm gun owners who are a risk to themselves and others, and gun buy-backs. More immediately, the President must create a **new White House position: the National Director of Gun Violence Prevention.** The National Director of GVP will manage multi-agency coordination in the service of a singular mission.<sup>30</sup> Short of creating a new federal agency dedicated to confronting gun violence — an enormous challenge in an age of partisan

gridlock — we believe this position represents our best, immediate shot at effective federal leadership. The National Director of GVP will carry the highest civilian-level title in the White House — Assistant to the President — and bypass traditional White House reporting structures like the Chief of Staff; instead **they will report directly to the President.** The Director will have an experienced team of federal officials tasked with actualizing the goal of saving 200,000 lives by reducing firearms deaths and injuries by at least 50% over the next ten years. They will focus on:

- **Empowering weakened federal agencies** — the National Director of GVP will ensure that **the whole of the federal bureaucracy will be much stronger than its individual parts.** With a direct line to the White House and a singular mandate to reduce gun deaths and injuries by 50%, the Director will provide agency heads at the ATF or CDC with a powerful advocate inside the White House. The Director will also work with the Department of Justice, the Treasury Department, and the IRS to **coordinate the establishment of the federal licensing process**, which could yield billions of dollars of additional federal revenue to address gun violence. The National Director of GVP's Day One priority: **allocate — as a down payment — \$250 million of annual funding to the CDC/HHS/DOJ to research how to best understand and address gun violence.** Studies have found that gun violence is the most seriously under-researched cause of death<sup>31</sup>, even while other causes with similar or lower rates of mortality, including hypertension, anemia, and malnutrition, have as much as \$1 billion in funding.

- **Educating Americans about the risks surrounding guns** — we have been taught by the gun lobby and industry that guns are safe products. Quite the opposite is true: the presence of a firearm in your home dramatically increases your chance of death.<sup>32</sup> Working with the CDC and interested advertising partners, **the National Director of GVP must launch a public safety campaign<sup>33</sup> around the dangers of firearms.**



- **Distributing resources to address the intersectional dimensions of gun violence** — working with Congressional appropriators and the private sector, as well as the resources afforded by the new federal licensing revenues, the National Director of GVP will coordinate the distribution of grants to state and local officials to address the many types of gun violence. **Gun violence in America differs dramatically by geography and demographics.** African American men are 10 times more likely to die by gun homicide than white men, but white men are 2.5 times more likely to die by gun suicide than African American men.<sup>34</sup> In short, **what works in one community to reduce gun violence may not work in another.** Some of the most promising solutions to address these distinct manifestations of gun violence include:

- **Community-based violence reduction** — urban gun violence, which accounts for a majority of the 14,000 gun homicides each year, is completely addressable.<sup>35</sup> Ample evidence indicates that urban gun violence is highly concentrated within a specific subset of young, at-risk men of color.<sup>36</sup> If we acknowledge this basic premise and **build a community-legitimate<sup>37</sup> and trauma-informed initiative** to provide direct individual outreach, social services, job creation, and crisis management programs<sup>38</sup> to interrupt and intervene with at-risk individuals, we can seriously reduce violence in our cities.<sup>39</sup> In fact, one researcher's estimate is that **\$899 million of funding over eight years** — a very small fraction of the federal budget — directed at the 40 cities in America with the highest rates of violence, would produce an outside return: **12,000 lives saved and \$120 billion saved in direct and indirect gun violence costs.** The National Director of GVP will ensure that we aggressively invest in reducing urban gun violence.

- **Police violence** — we cannot talk about gun violence in communities without talking about our **national challenges with police violence.** Officer-involved shootings are now a leading cause of death for young American men.<sup>40</sup> While police violence both contributes to, and is influenced by, weak gun laws,<sup>41</sup> **we also need structural reforms that directly**

**produce better policing.** The Director must work with local police departments and the DOJ to fund and implement programs to better train officers in implicit bias, conflict resolution, and crisis intervention. We must also promote stricter policies on the use of force, strengthen civilian interaction training, expand de-escalation training,<sup>42</sup> and improve data collection on officer-involved shootings.<sup>43</sup> We also call on the Director to implement the findings of President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing,<sup>44</sup> including reinstituting the practice of DOJ civil rights investigations of local police departments and DOJ enforcement of local consent decrees.<sup>45</sup> Finally, we believe that gun violence prevention goes in tandem with criminal justice reforms, including pretrial and sentencing reform and support for restorative justice programs<sup>46</sup> and re-entry jobs programs<sup>47</sup> that reflect an approach to healing our communities after the violence occurs. **The more successful we are with stronger gun policies, the fewer firearms enter the illegal market, and the lower the footprint of the criminal justice system in people's lives.**

- **Suicide prevention** — suicides represent the majority of gun deaths in America, accounting for nearly two-thirds of gun deaths, with half of all suicides committed with a firearm.<sup>48</sup> Gun suicide rates are rising particularly for older white men<sup>49</sup> and younger people of color,<sup>50</sup> fueling a **crisis of suicide that has surged 30%** in the last two decades.<sup>51</sup> Research supports a straightforward correlation: more guns means more lethal suicide attempts.<sup>52</sup> To address these challenges, we believe the solutions are twofold. First, we must pass and implement **federal policies** that create more barriers (permanent revocation, temporary holds, and waiting periods) to firearm access for at-risk individuals who are a danger to themselves. Second, we must **invest in state and local suicide prevention programs**, including gun seller partnerships,<sup>53</sup> behavioral health service programs,<sup>54</sup> lethal means training for health care providers and other gatekeepers,<sup>55</sup> hotlines, and crisis intervention training for law enforcement.<sup>56</sup> These programs must form another crucial pillar of the National Director of GVP's coordination and investment

priorities to ensure that we make suicide prevention programs more accessible than firearms.

- **Intimate partner violence** — firearms make intimate partner violence all the more dangerous; American women are five times more likely to be killed in a domestic violence incident when there is a gun in the home<sup>57</sup> and many recent mass shooters have been linked to domestic violence.<sup>58</sup> That's why we recommend **gun licensing denials** for any type of domestic violence offender. On top of that, we would leverage the resources of our federal licensing system **to fully fund domestic violence programs**, including the National Domestic Violence Hotline and other programmatic components of the Violence Against Women Act.<sup>59</sup>

- **Mental and behavioral health programs** — we believe that there is a **false choice** in our country today: stronger gun laws or more behavioral health funding. First, it is crucial to acknowledge: **mental illness is not a risk factor for interpersonal gun violence**; in fact, individuals struggling with mental illness are more likely to be victims of gun violence than offenders.<sup>60</sup> The next Administration needs to reject rhetoric that stigmatizes people with mental illness and invest aggressively in gun violence prevention **and** mental and behavioral health programs. Our next Administration **must make holistic investments in mental and behavioral health services and programs for all communities** that are struggling with the aftermath of all gun violence: the daily toll of homicides,<sup>61</sup> suicides, and mass shootings.<sup>62</sup> Our goal: make it as easy to access mental and behavioral health services in these communities as it was to access firearms.





The final component of an urgent federal response is about us: our nation's youth. We started March For Our Lives because we believe our generation must do our part to ensure a simple future: **we are the last generation that has to grow up with gun violence.** In 1961, President John F. Kennedy worked with Congress to establish the Peace Corps, which has become an iconic program demonstrating what is best about America.<sup>63</sup> The next President and National Director of GVP should **establish a Peace Corps for Violence Prevention, known as the Safety Corps.** Over the next 10 years, this new domestic program **would put 10,000 young people per year to work on paid, one-year engagements** in communities and nonprofits around the country. The Safety Corps would unlock the power of young people to bolster the civic infrastructure of anti-poverty and criminal justice reform nonprofit programs that address the root causes of gun violence. Our aim is twofold: (1) give young Americans valuable work experience and lived proximity to the complex, comprehensive ways of preventing gun violence and (2) give nonprofits additional capacity to accelerate their crucial missions. Anyone 16 – 25 years of age would be eligible and the program would pay a living wage, therefore accommodating young people no matter their level of wealth; **the program can function as a gap year to college or community college or as an on-ramp into a permanent career in the nonprofit sector.**

To support the above efforts, **we must implement automatic voter registration at the moment that young Americans turn 18 years old.** Automatic voter registration is already state law in 16 states and the District of Columbia; it increases voter registration rates, cleans up voter rolls, and saves states money.<sup>64</sup> We need a federal fix instead of a patchwork of state laws to modernize our voter registration process. Additionally, we need federal policies to allow for pre-registration of young people when they turn 16, which is an existing practice in many states.<sup>65</sup> The more we participate in our civic process, the more effective we will be at reducing the impact of gun violence on the next generation.

## A GUN LOBBY AND INDUSTRY HELD TO ACCOUNT

**For too long, the unpatriotic gun lobby and industry has run Washington. Those days are over.**

Finally, the next Administration must use the full force of the federal government to bring the reckless and irresponsible gun lobby and industry to justice for the irreparable harm they have brought to the American people, beginning with the gun lobby's decades-long campaign to change our interpretation of the Second Amendment.<sup>66</sup> Key elements of accountability would include:

- **The Second Amendment — we believe the next administration must commit to reexamining the District of Columbia v. Heller decision.** Many distinguished jurists<sup>67</sup> from across the political spectrum<sup>68</sup> have excoriated the Heller decision as contrary to the historical record and the height of judicial activism.<sup>69</sup> This controversial decision deserves a serious rethinking. We propose three paths to do this:
  - **Attorney general study on the Heller decision** — during the George W. Bush Administration, Attorney General John Ashcroft asked the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel to study the constitutional basis for whether the Second Amendment guaranteed an individual right to own a firearm, a constitutional question that had been considered settled<sup>70</sup> by the federal courts.<sup>71</sup> Using academic research supported by the gun lobby, the Justice Department concluded that the Second Amendment secures an individual right to bear and keep arms, setting the foundation for the controversial 2008 District of Columbia v. Heller decision. We believe that **it's long past time for the Justice Department to reexamine the Heller decision.**

- **Federal judicial nominations** — the next generation of federal judges appointed by the President need to be champions of gun violence prevention and a different





interpretation of the Second Amendment. Working with us, other gun violence prevention groups, and legal scholars, the next Presidential transition **must develop a slate of gun violence prevention champions** for federal judicial nominations, modeled off the strategies of the Federalist Society.<sup>72</sup>

- **Supreme Court reform** — finally, given the structural limitations of the U.S. Supreme Court, we stand with several presidential candidates,<sup>73</sup> former Attorney General Eric Holder,<sup>74</sup> and various democracy reform groups<sup>75</sup> in recommending that we have a **national conversation about strategies** to ensure the Court's independence from partisan political influence and interference.

- **NRA investigations** — the NRA is under serious scrutiny from multiple local, state, and federal entities for self-dealing and mismanagement.<sup>76</sup> This should offend responsible NRA members and gun owners alike. On Day One, the next President must (1) direct the IRS to open an **investigation into the tax-exempt nonprofit status** of the NRA and (2) direct the FEC to open an **investigation into whether the NRA has violated campaign finance laws**.

- **Gun industry accountability** — the firearms industry needs to be better regulated. This begins with a much more muscular ATF. With increased funding, ATF must aggressively take enforcement action on the small minority of irresponsible gun dealers and manufacturers who are supplying the illegal market for gun crimes.<sup>77</sup> We must also equip ATF with the tools to actually fight gun crimes, like enabling searchable gun records across the agency.<sup>78</sup> In addition, we need federal policies that require anti-theft reporting and training to deter straw purchases and gun trafficking.<sup>79</sup> Real accountability for the gun industry doesn't just protect our communities — it also protects America's gun owners from an industry and NRA that doesn't have their best interests at heart

- **Repeal PLCAA** — one of the biggest favors granted to the gun lobby by Congress is the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA), which gives gun manufacturers and

dealers broad immunity from legal liability.<sup>80</sup> PLCAA is both an injustice — removing a method of redress for gun violence victims and survivors — and a shield for the industry from economic incentives to make their products and distribution channels safer. **We must repeal PLCAA.**

- **Consumer safety standards for firearms** — unlike a variety of other consumer products like cars and toys, firearms are specifically exempt from consumer product oversight over their manufacturing and design. We need to change that, to ensure that **firearms are expressly regulated by the Consumer Product Safety Commission**.<sup>81</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Everywhere we look, gun violence is decimating our families and communities. Whether it's the mass shootings in shopping malls, concerts, schools, and places of worship, the retaliatory gun violence in urban neighborhoods haunted by the legacy of economic disinvestment, racism, and poverty, or the solitary suicides committed nationwide with increasing frequency, gun violence adds up: over 100 Americans die from it every day. 100 lives lost every single day. **We started March For Our Lives to say, "Not One More."** No more school shooting drills. No more burying loved ones. No more American exceptionalism in all the wrong ways. But we cannot do this alone. We need leaders — in the White House, in Congress, and on the Supreme Court — who care about the future of our children and our nation. We call on every Presidential candidate for the 2020 election to endorse our Peace Plan for a Safer America.

**MARCH  
FOR OUR  
LIVES** 

## FOOTNOTES

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